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How the Tiwi Construct the Deceased's Postself in Mortuary Ritual

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I will discuss Tiwi mortuary rites as a transformative, relational process in which the deceased's postself is created. The deceased's self is fashioned and manifested after death through a series of ritual practices performed by specific relatives. This approach allows me not only to stress the concern Tiwi people show about being remembered after death but also how this concern defines each participant's ceremonial role and constitutes one of the mortuary ritual's major aims. The deceased will be remembered as portrayed in the final rites.



KEYWORDS

Postself; death; mortuary rites; Tiwi; Aborigines; Australia

Introduction

What is Tiwi mortuary ritual about? During the course of the twentieth century, the death rites of the Tiwi from Bathurst and Melville Islands in North Australia have drawn considerable anthropological attention (cf. Spencer 1914; Mountford 1958; Hart and Pilling 1960; Goodale 1971; Brandl 1971; Grau 1983; Robinson 1990; Venbrux 1995). It has been suggested that an entire lifetime of anthropological study would not be enough to grasp these elaborate, intricate and complex rituals in their entirety (Gary Robinson, personal communication). Drawing on the extensive ethnographic record however, it can be illuminating to investigate them further, particularly when utilising an analytic vocabulary of relations and their transformation. Key to Tiwi mortuary ritual, I will argue, is the construction of the deceased's postself.

'The postself is who you are after you are dead. It is your postmortem reputation, how you are remembered' (Shneidman 2008, 150). Tiwi mortuary rites can be seen as a transformative, relational process in which the deceased's postself is created. The Tiwi namely review the character, actions, relationships and life course of the newly dead person in their elaborate death rites. The ritual actors construct a social biography of the deceased in their collective endeavour, defining the social loss and constituting the new spirit of the dead. The deceased will be remembered as portrayed in the final rites. What is more, as we will see, the postself, secured by the performance of the rites impacts and influences the world of the living.

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The distinctive selves that are important to Tiwi merit our attention. Contesting the stereotype of non-western people lacking individuality, Hart (1954) carefully describes the ‘individual differences’ (in personality) between the sons of one Tiwi man. In their mortuary rites, as Goodale and Koss (1971) make clear, the Tiwi put a premium on individual creativity and originality. ‘Tiwi are conceived as unique beings first’, Goodale concludes in her study of Tiwi life-cycle rites; she adds that these are mainly ‘ego-oriented’ (1971, 335). In his seminal essay on the notions of person and self, Mauss (1985, 11) refers to ‘the reincarnation of spirits’ among Aborigines. The Tiwi, however, only once pass through three worlds in linear fashion. The little spirit child (or preself) is in the world of the unborn until being dreamt of by the future father, the spiritual conception. The self of the living person is further shaped psycho-somatically in initiation rituals, although very limited nowadays, and other, more or less marked passage rites by means of the acquisition of knowledge and attachments during the course of life. This is reviewed (see below) in the cycle of mortuary rites after death with the final rite (called *iloti* or ‘for good’) marking the shift to the world of the dead; the spirit of the dead and postself will henceforth be known as constructed in the death rites (cf. Goodale 1971; Venbrux 1995). The symbolic interactionist theory of the self, first developed by American philosopher George Herbert Mead (1972, 135–226), probably captures best what transpires in the mortuary rites.¹

For Mead (1972, 140) ‘it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience’. He considers the self a social process of meaning making rather than a given. As Jakoby (2012, 686) puts it, ‘the self is constructed and defined in social interaction with significant others’. The self can be an object to itself due to an internalised conversation of gestures. This communication in the sense of symbols or ‘objects’ (anything accorded meaning socially, including human beings, spiritual entities and physical objects) is thus directed to oneself as it would be to others: ‘the symbol should arouse in one’s self what it arouses in the other individual’ (Mead 1972, 149). It implies reflexive thought, grounded in experiential relations and interactions. Mead (1972, 164) notes that

No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also. The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group.

The individual maintains different relationships to different people and so might have different selves: ‘We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances’ (Mead 1972, 142). According to Mead (1972, 144n4), ‘The unity of the self is constituted by the unity of the entire relational pattern of social behavior and experience in which the individual is implicated’. With regard to this entire pattern, he also speaks of ‘the generalized other’ (which might include the environment) (Mead 1972, 154). Mead (1972, 201–202) further makes clear that the person’s unique standpoint in the symbolic interaction with significant others allows for individuality.

In Tiwi death rites the deceased’s self is fashioned after death by significant others. Rather than the original experience, according to Mead (1972, 148), the ‘process of finding the expression in language which will call out the emotion once had is more easily accomplished when one is dealing with the memory of it’. In the rites of passage not only the deceased but also the survivors are undergoing a transformation. The

latter experience a ‘loss of self that [had been] constructed through interactions with the deceased’ (Jakoby 2012, 686). They have to make sense of the loss of (part of) self and adjust to it, emphasising ‘the subjective interpretations and meanings associated with the loss of a significant other’ (Jakoby 2012, 689). This could be perceived as a tension between autonomy and relatedness (Beck 1924, 25–26; Myers 1986, 108, 124). For the Tiwi, as we will see, this also means an ‘embodied relatedness’ (Glaskin 2012). The survivors have to take part in the rites in order to accomplish the construction of the deceased’s postself as well as to deal with their (partial) loss of self. ‘Not to attend is not to recognize the other as part of one’s self’ (Macdonald 2008, 131). Bonnemère (2014, 729) argues that ‘relational transformations can be effected only if the terms comprising the relationship are present’. In other words, the presence of socially relevant others is a precondition for the status passage. Elsewhere, I have suggested that Tiwi performers can realise a relative autonomy, ‘in disconnecting or distancing the deceased from the self’ through mortuary ritual (Venbrux 1995, 231; cf. Mead 1972, 172). Precisely these moments allow for reflection on their relationship to the deceased. It must be noted that both the dead and the living are supposed to be present on these occasions. While the living are dancing the spirits of the dead dance as well in an adjacent dancing ground. The ritual workers (affines of the deceased) make hitting gestures with sticks to keep them separate from the living. The spirit(s) of the dead are given voice in the songs. More often than not, the songs composed for the occasion consist of a dialogue between the performer and the spirit of the deceased. The word of the dead person, as Robinson (1997, 313) notes, is considered a guideline ‘for the Tiwi in deciding life-choices’ of utmost importance. It is also in this way that the postself has an impact on the world of the living.

Hart and Pilling (1960) consider the death rites an important avenue to gain prestige. To this purpose the survivors may organise a grand-scale ritual, compose clever songs, perform spectacular dances or carve and paint outstanding grave posts. Inevitably, however, the achievements of the living also contribute to the posthumous reputation and influence of the deceased. The size, quality and number of grave posts, for example, are an index of prestige, not only of those who organise the mortuary rites but also of the dead person (Goodale 1971, 310). The ritual gestures and accomplishments have a bearing on the deceased’s postself.

To take our discussion further, we need to know a little more about the concept of the postself and its applicability to the Tiwi context. After introducing the concept, I will briefly introduce Tiwi mortuary ritual and proceed with showing how the deceased’s postself is constructed in the death rites. In the concluding remarks I try to make clear how a dead person’s postself impacts and influences the world of the living and I will return to the key concepts of presence and transformation of relations in the light of the Tiwi material. Let us now turn to the concept of the postself.

The Postself in Social Context

The term ‘postself’ was coined by American psychologist Edwin Shneidman (1973, 45). Shneidman analysed suicide notes in which the authors indicate how they want to be remembered after death. Simultaneously, although unable to pursue it themselves, they are concerned with exerting their influence on ‘the many details of continued living’ (Shneidman and Faberow 1957, 8). For Shneidman, the postself is a person’s posthumous

‘reputation, impact and influence’ (2008, 30). The term postself thus stands for how people ‘fashion and solidify selves that extend beyond death’ (Sandstrom 1988, 354). Shneidman speaks of ‘an individual’s postcontinuation’, the concern with one’s ‘image in the memory of the survivors’ (Shneidman, Faberow, and Litman 1970, 59).

Whereas Shneidman mainly focuses on the efforts of an individual during life in view of securing how one is remembered, others have expanded the concept to include how the survivors actually remember the person after death (Wojtkowiak and Venbrux 2009, 147–150). Indeed, as Schmitt and Leonard (1986, 1089) put it, ‘The postself, more than other versions of the self, reflects the inseparability of the individual and society’. The expansion of the notion of postself is important. Kamerman, for example, considers Shneidman’s preoccupation with the individual too ‘psychologistic’ (2003, 302). He convincingly argues that the postself has to be put in social context. Following Kamerman’s understanding of the postself, I will try to demonstrate how the Tiwi construct the deceased’s postself in their death rites.

Thus far the concept has only been applied in western contexts (see Nelson 1980; Schmitt and Leonard 1986; Kamerman 2003; Wojtkowiak and Venbrux 2009; Kearn 2010; Goncharova 2013). ‘It is only under special societal circumstances that the mechanisms for producing posthumous reputations are institutionalized’, according to Kamerman (2003, 302). In my view these mechanisms have been institutionalised in Tiwi mortuary ritual. Hart and Pilling (1960, 52) portray the Tiwi as being involved in a struggle for prestige over others to which they devote most of their lives:

The ‘game’ was one of trying to win friends and increase influence over others. The ‘assets’, in a tribe with such little material possessions as the Tiwi, were mostly intangible ones such as friendship, ‘help’, goodwill, respect of others, control over others, importance, and influence.

In spite of the fact that considerable changes have taken place in the life circumstances of the Tiwi since the days of Hart and Pilling’s fieldwork (in 1928–1929 and in 1954, respectively) later ethnographers have only confirmed the importance of the struggle for prestige and influence (cf. Goodale 1971, 290, 297, 310; Osborne 1974, 111n2; Venbrux 1995, 196, 204, 231). The desire to be conceived of as ‘important’ is still very much at stake in the death rites, expressed by the Tiwi in words as well as in ritual gestures.

The ethnographic record further shows that the Tiwi put considerable time and effort in their mortuary rites (for example, Brandl 1971; Goodale 1971; Grau 1983). The centrality of death-related behaviour in Tiwi cultural action culminates in the ideal of the production of prestigious mortuary rites. The more prestigious, the more memorable they will be, and this influences how the deceased’s postself be remembered and respected. The lasting ‘image in the memory of the survivors’ (Shneidman, Faberow, and Litman 1970, 59) is constituted in the death rites. There is an intensity or visibility to the relational aspect of a deceased person’s identity precisely because it finds its final and definitive expression in the rites. Hence the constellation of participants and the kind of relationships they seek to stress and transform are decisive in view of the person’s postself.

Much as they are in life, the postmortem identities of the dead are relational, therefore the construction of the deceased’s postself in mortuary ritual necessitates a transformation of their relationship with the momentary community of participants. The latter fit their personal stories about their past relationship with the deceased into the central narrative of the death rites. All Tiwi are kin or classificatory kin and as such can often relate to each

other in more than one way. Consequently, ritual performers frequently have to make choices with regard to optional kin relationships to the deceased (Grau 1983). This gives them political room to manoeuvre. In his seminal article on identity preservation after death, Unruh (1983, 349) notes that ‘continued attachment is not something which simply happens as a result of some psychological state, but it often arises out of strategic social action’ (cf. Venbrux 1993). Furthermore, Grau (1983, 333) finds that kin relationships manifested in the death rites by means of dance serve as ‘models for kinship practice’. How the participants construct the deceased’s postself thus impacts on the world of the living.

Mortuary Ritual and the Postself

The postself is defined both by how one wants to be remembered posthumously and how one actually is remembered by others after death. Tiwi death rites revolve around the mark the deceased left behind on the survivors.

The cycle of mortuary rites comprises of a funeral, a series of intermediary rites, and postfuneral rites. The aim is to guide the spirit of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead. ‘In the world of the dead, individuals maintain all achieved skills and prestige that they had in the world of the living’, according to Goodale (1971, 334). An enduring image of the deceased’s standing or estimation in the eyes of the survivors is created with the accomplishment of the concluding final rite, the *iloti* (meaning ‘for good’). The dead person is given voice in the song and dance ceremonies, while the living performers go through the life course of the deceased from spiritual conception onwards. They review how they experienced and perceived the recently deceased from the angle of their specific social and cosmological relationships.

With regard to these rituals, a death incapacitates the close relatives of the deceased because they are subject to mourning taboos (Hart and Pilling 1960, 91–93). Taboos prevent them from undertaking tasks such as handling the corpse, preparing the ceremonial grounds, and sculpting grave posts themselves. The close relatives of the deceased, therefore, are dependent on members of other clans, with whom they also exchange marriage partners, for the performance of ritual services. They are expected, however, to act as ritual workers when the roles are reversed and there is a death in the other group.

The funeral mostly takes place within 24 hours of death. Hart and Pilling (1960, 91) note that people were reluctant to move on from a dwelling place when they expected someone was about to die there. Modern means of communication and transport have made it easier to visit the dying in time, as well as to attend funerals. In order to recognise one’s relationship to the deceased one needs to be present at the funeral (or, with an acceptable excuse, at least at the postfuneral rites). During life the dead person may have developed closer relations to some people than to others. In the words of Macdonald (2008, 130), referring to the Wiradjuri, ‘Sociality is achieved rather than ascribed, and will be worked on over a lifetime’. This also holds for the Tiwi. As mentioned, prestige – influence over others – is considered important. The scale and elaboration of the death rites attest to indebtedness of the participants to the deceased, and to those who organised the rites on behalf of the dead person. Simultaneously, ascribed bonds of kinship, whether of distant or

close nature, count as a reason to attend. The more distant kin might want to be involved, thus creating a debt to them and possibly obtain prestige.

The gathering for the funeral amounts to the deceased's web of relationships. Or as Macdonald (2008, 131) puts it, 'The funeral does not attract a gathering of "the community"; it is the community in its only manifestation'. That is to say, the death is counteracted by a continuation of social life (Macdonald 2008, 134). This continuation entails a transformative, relational process because the mortuary rites focus on the transition of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead. The funeral initiates this shift, affecting not only the status of the deceased but also of the survivors. This is accomplished by several means, one of which is special 'bereavement status-terms' (Brandl 1971, 233) that are employed when the latter work through the transformation of relationships to the dead person.

The terms, comparable to ones in the English language such as orphan and widow, designate a limited set of ritual roles, grouping kin in categories of people that have a particular relationship to the deceased as their theme. Following the ritual script, these people perform songs and dances that encompass 'an ordered series of relational transformations' (Bonnemère 2014, 728) related to the successive phases in the dead person's life course. This trajectory runs from the pre-human world of the spirit children (*pupatuwi*) through the various stages of life amongst people (*tiwi*) in the world of the living to the spirits (*mopadruwi*) in the world of the dead. The performances in the different roles are based on the relationship to the deceased. Taken together they provide a portrayal of the deceased as a well-rounded person. The transformation of relationships, allowing dialogical reflection, is crucial to the outcome of the death rites: the constitution of a new spirit of the dead and the construction of the deceased's postself.

Hart and Pilling (1960, 91–92) interpret the desire of people to be present when someone dies as political action. Presence enables them to take advantage of the situation. The close relatives of the deceased cannot enact the role of ritual workers themselves. Consequently, they become inevitably indebted to those who can carry out these tasks. The dying person, for their part, can give directions with regard to the death rites to be performed and the place of burial (Venbrux 1995, 91). In other words, the dying have a legitimate concern with their postself, with how they will be remembered. They can exert influence on the proceedings after their death.

The urge people feel to be present at the time of dying is understandable, because a death initiates the transformation of relationships to the deceased, a transformation that is effected in the postfuneral rites. Both close kin who interacted on a daily basis with the deceased, and the eldest in every category of person related to the deceased, become subject to behavioural restrictions or taboos immediately. It also applies to anything closely associated with the newly dead, such as footpaths, objects, dogs, places and names; in short, everything that might be subject to the attention of the deceased's spirit. The close kin will ask some people belonging to the category of *ambaruwi* (siblings-in-law) to handle and dispose of the corpse. The dead person's will is usually respected.

The funeral consists of two dance and song ceremonies, one in an open space around the corpse next to where the dead person lived and another one in the graveyard around the newly made grave mound. Newly arrived close relatives go up to the body, face it, and wail and hit themselves, mostly on the parts of the body that indicate their relationship to

the deceased. Others address the close relatives sitting near the corpse. As long as the dead body is present the Tiwi do not regard their dancing and singing as a 'proper' ceremony (Venbrux 1995). It might be conceived of as preliminary (in similar fashion, singers can start with putting the words of their song in the right order first). In Pirlangimpi, one of the present day townships, only the affines and patrilineal relatives are allowed to dance; the matrilineal relatives are considered too closely related. People from other townships appear to be less strict (Grau 1983, 116–117). The actual widower or widow, however, always comes last. The performance tells about the intimate life with the deceased. During the funeral the lyrics are mostly in the form of a dialogue between the singer and the dead person, whose voice is imitated. On this occasion the singers use 'straight words', expressing their experiences with the deceased in a straightforward manner. The audience is supposed to listen first before they cry. The emotions are intense, so this not always adhered to. A Catholic Mass can be said before or after the first ceremony, while a priest also may come and bless the grave. At a funeral that draws a large audience, a singer can have the dead person say that many people came for him or her (Venbrux 1995, 105), thus referring to the deceased's influence and reputation.

A number of months after the burial, and preferably in the dry season, a series of post-funeral rituals will be held (see below). The rituals vary in number, scale and elaboration from the one deceased to the other, which is indicative of the relative importance of the dead person. In addition, attention will be paid to the newly dead in the *kulama*, an initiation and increase ritual (Brandl 1970) at the close of the wet season. During the first night of this ritual the participants lie down and perform songs about their grievances and grief. The spirits of the dead of the past year are called to be present for the night of sorrow. Close relatives of the dead also tend to come to listen to the songs in which the dead literally are given a voice and that tell about the respective dead person's behaviour (including idiosyncracies and quirks) and relationship with the performer.

The initiation rites happen to be interwoven with the death rites (see De Lary Healy, this issue). Initiates can perform in a number of postfuneral rituals, the *ilanigha*. It concerns the first phase of initiation. The rites promote, and coalesce into, the deceased relative's initiation into the world of the dead and so reinforce one another as rites of separation. Relationships with the same set of relatives are transformed in both instances. These relational transformations, at two different moments in the life course, are inter-linked for the initiates move towards a status elevation, enabling them to take up a social position held by the deceased. In this way they substitute for the deceased, as it were, filling a hole in the social fabric caused by the death. It must be noted that over the course of the twentieth century progressively fewer people were initiated and that the proceedings became abbreviated. Goodale (1971, 259) noted that *pukamani* (mortuary ritual) were 'the most important ceremony in a person's life' and this remains the case today.

The postfuneral rituals commence with three small rites that can be performed separately or in one go. The elected ritual workers (in-laws of the deceased) are formally commissioned to make the grave posts and given an axe, fire and ochres respectively. They will carve and paint the tree trunks to be erected around the grave at the conclusion of the cycle of mortuary rites. The initial rituals are followed by a series of small dance and other rites, called *ilanigha*, that have the *dreaming* (clan totem) of the deceased as their theme. Their

aim is to chase away the spirit of the deceased from the living (in space and time) to its destination. The first one starts with awakening the spirit by stamping hard on the ground. The participants face in the direction of the place of burial and a goose-feather ball on a cord may be thrown thrice in a little arc to point out the spirit's destination. The next performances contain an energetic dance in which earth is thrown up with the feet. This dance is preferably carried out by young men ready to undergo initiation (*ilanighi*), referring to the tantrums of little children loosening themselves from their parents. Also, rites such as a mock fight with the ritual workers, tree-climbing or fire-jumping by the initiates, or tossing initiates (or a goose-feather ball as a substitute) in the air, and a mock fight between potential spouses can be part of an *ilanigha* (Spencer 1914, 110–111; Mountford 1958, 71–74; Goodale 1971, 284–288). In the mock fight, people hit each other with green boughs, where appropriate, at places indicating the relationship to the dead person. In principle, the *ilanigha* can go on infinitely, until a close relative of the deceased 'breaks' them by calling for the *iloti* or grand final ritual.

Whether an *iloti* is called for sooner or later, the scale and duration of the final ritual varies with the prestige of the dead person and the support the organising relatives can muster. The workers go ahead in approaching the ceremonial ground, shouting and waving with sticks to drive the spirits of the dead back. They hit the earth and the lined up grave posts. Then the other participants rush forward and collectively wail at the posts. Next, the workers light a fire and people ritually cleanse themselves by means of the smoke. The call for *iloti* signals that an extensive dance and song ceremony (*yoi*) can start. In contrast to the burial, bracketed by two such ceremonies, now all available people in the various categories of bereavement status can dance. The songs, however, are more metaphorical, containing 'hard words'. The Tiwi describe the *pukamani* in terms of 'trouble' as the performers narrate about the unfinished business between the dead person and themselves. Both points of view can be expressed with impunity (Goodale 1971, 188). As in the previous ceremonies there are two types of dances, one related to bereavement status (mortuary kinship) and the other to *dreamings* (cosmological relationships). In each category of dancers the two types may be performed one after the other or combined. A senior man in the respective category sings a fitting song. Thereafter, the lyrics are picked up by a group of male singers at the edge of the dancing ground, who sing during the performance of the respective dance. They beat time with sticks or with their hands on their buttocks.

The order of the various categories of performers follows the trajectory of the dead person through the life course. These categories lump (actual and classificatory) kin together with a particular relationship to the deceased. They do so, as a Tiwi man once explained to me, from the perspective of the recently demised: 'call me father', 'call me mother', and so forth. In other words, they enact the ritual roles of bereaved parents, children, grandparents, siblings or cousins of the deceased. The same goes for the spouse and in-laws. In this way the life course is conceived of as 'an ordered series of relational transformations' (Bonnemère 2014, 728). A script inherited from the mythological ancestors has to be followed (Mountford 1958), but the participants link the conventional ritual events with their own stories and personal experiences put in metaphorical language and action. They can thus elaborate in their lyrics and ritual gestures on what they find memorable about the deceased, be it an occurrence, the way of walking or talking, verbal expressions, a character trait or typifying action, indebtedness or debt concerning

the exchange of marriage partners between clans, sexual encounters, irate or kind behaviour. Important are also cosmological identifications, the use of space, ritual calls (names of places and ancestors), posture, skin texture, tone of voice, the shape of the grave posts, the shades of colour and patterns used in body paintings and paintings of the posts, and ritual paraphernalia. Tiny details reveal worlds to the audience in this small-scale society.

Re-enactment of Past Events

Given the scope of this article I cannot go into great detail (I refer to Venbrux 1995), but will briefly discuss the successive categories of performers. Goodale (1971) first discovered the existence of Tiwi mortuary kinship or bereavement status terms, and Brandl (1971) and Grau (1983) documented them accurately (cf. Venbrux 1995). The patrilineal 'children' (actual and classificatory) of the deceased, known as *mamurapi* (*turah*), re-enact their spiritual conception. This occurred in a dream, experienced by their (now dead) father in which little spirit children spear him, making clear his wife was expecting a baby. The patrilineal 'grandparents' or *kerimerika* have such a dream of spirit children as well, of course, but feel pain in their heart when speared. They perform the same dance with (real or imaginary) spears, except for holding one hand on their heart (also the hurt due to the death). Next, the maternal 'grandparents' or *kiakiei* carry the dead person as a baby on their shoulders, indicating it is an important person. The 'fathers', called *unantawi* (*pulunga*), 'made' the deceased: they dance pointing at swollen loins or miming cutting off their male genitals. Cousins with one grandparent in common, the *mutuni*, lose half of their face (to be found back at grandparent's grave, where also the spirit of the dead is supposed to go) or have it wounded otherwise (boiled, scratched). They are hit or hit themselves in the face, often having only half of their face painted up.

When a female deceased has sons-in-law, they ought to dance as *impala*, hitting their shoulders with green boughs (in relation to the mother-in-law taboo). The dead person's matrilineal 'children', *mamurapi* (*pularti*), attempt to get breastfed to no avail. They hold their fist to their lips, and conclude with turning their head backwards. The 'mothers' or *unantawi* (*pularti*) enact the reverse role: they hold their breasts and sing about the pain and having no milk available anymore. The mother's brothers (matrilineal descent, hence a sort of mothers) belong to the same category and may dance the contractions and childbirth or holding the baby in their arms. The maternal 'brothers' of the deceased, the *paputawi*, hold one leg while they dance, and sing of their injured or an amputated leg (the lost sibling, see also De Laryg Healy, this issue). Alluding to the mythological ancestor Pura-kapali, who brought death into the world and was hit by his younger brother with a forked fighting stick in the leg, they often paint two white bands on their lower leg. They hit it at the beginning and the end of their dance.

Finally, the *ambaruwi* perform. Those acting as workers dance in fighting poses, moving a fish-shaped stick (*aruwala*), to ward off the spirits of the dead. Their theme is sexual jealousy, showing their sexual attractiveness towards the deceased (for example, by the seductive movement of showing their knees) and aggressiveness (for example, by performing the shark dance) towards their living and dead relatives who compete with them for the attention of the dead person. During the ceremony they keep the spirits of the dead at bay, dancing in the background, offering support and protection to close relations who perform their dance centre stage. In turn, spouses or lovers may support

them in their dance by making pushing movements with their hands, referring to waves on the beach (which has a sexual connotation for the Tiwi). The actual widow or widower does not show aggressiveness, but has a slightly different style of dancing, displaying the features of sexual intercourse with the partner when both alive. They may undress and, singing with the voice of the deceased, ask why they can no longer have sex.

The relational transformations constitute the new spirit of the dead. 'Spiritual and physical conception, childcare, pregnancy and childbirth, nurturing and being nurtured, and sexuality as well as body symbolism focus on a particular relationship with the deceased' (Venbrux 1995, 95). For example, the maternal 'brother' sings of the deceased as if he were his own amputated leg. 'It was flown to the hospital in Darwin on the mainland. But these the doctors couldn't do anything for the leg anymore and it was sent back to the islands.' The performers fit their personal stories about their past relationship and experiences with the deceased into the frame story or central narrative. The performances can be met with 'criticism or acclaim' (Goodale 1971, 305), but when songs and dances are cheered and turn out to be memorable they are a source of great prestige (1971, 290, 297). As mentioned, the number and quality of grave posts add to this prestige, and the workers are paid accordingly.

These payments consisted of artefacts and ritual paraphernalia, but became substituted by trade goods and money respectively. Rather than money being mentioned, it is offered in ritual fashion by means of the deceased's dreaming dance (for instance, from the mouth of the crocodile in the crocodile dance) and song designating it, for example, as spears, whelks or tobacco. When the workers are satisfied, they place the grave posts in a circle around the grave. A sibling of the dead person ritually cleanses the widow or widower with water, releasing the person in question from mourning taboos (*pukamani*). People wail collectively for the last time at the grave, say farewell to the spirit of the dead, and leave.

From then on, the deceased will be remembered as portrayed in the mortuary rituals. An 'image in the memory of survivors' (Shneidman, Faberow, and Litman 1970, 59), a postself, has been constructed. The postself refers to one's 'reputation and influence after death' (Shneidman 1995, 454). But how does it influence and impact on the world of the living?

Concluding Remarks

For the Tiwi, the spirit of the dead is an active agent. We saw that both the dead and the living participate in the mortuary rites and that the dead person is given voice. The dead are thought to have the power to take the living to them. They can be a threat to (make lethal interventions) as well as a source of life. Their descendants have territorial rights in the area surrounding the place of burial, where the spirit of the dead lives. People call out to the spirit(s) of the dead for permission and assistance when they go out hunting and gathering in the area. Sand from the grave brings good luck. Furthermore, the spirit of the dead can be asked for favours and healing. The impact and influence relate to posthumous reputation, the stronger that reputation, the more likely the postself will be a model for behaviour and a source of entitlements. Songs, dances and gestures will be re-enacted on other occasions as a legacy for those who survive the deceased. Stories about a reputed ancestor with prestigious mortuary rituals will be transmitted for a long time. Astonishingly, the intricate pattern and shape of a grave post was kept in

personal memory in every detail for four decades. Prestige transcending death is of course the ultimate success of something that is already a key concern during the Tiwi lifespan.

The review of the deceased's life course from the angle of the series of relevant social relationships, taking place in the mortuary rites, is witnessed and shared. In its completeness this review results in a well-rounded portrayal of the dead person. The fixed image of the deceased will be remembered as such. Given the centrality of death-related behaviour in Tiwi cultural action, a marked postself is likely to be referred to, even in clues that reveal worlds to the audience. The application of the concept of the postself gives an improved insight into what Tiwi mortuary ritual is about and how seemingly unrelated aspects of the rites hang together.

The case of Tiwi mortuary ritual shows the relevance of presence of the terms that comprise a relationship for it to be transformed. We have seen that the life course is conceived of 'as an ordered series of relational transformations' (Bonnemère 2014, 728). Furthermore, the transformation of relationships, allowing dialogical reflection, appeared to be decisive for the result: the construction of a postself.

The ceremonies in which the transformation took place started in all earnest after the burial. Preliminary events entailed expressions of grief and dance and song that stressed relationships to the dying or deceased, but these must be conceived of as in the process of sorting out what in the formal rites could be worked upon. In this context, people's presence was significant but not decisive. The workers who handled the corpse, for instance, are in a good position to be commissioned for the postfuneral rites. If they are, they are given an axe in a small ritual and asked to make the grave posts that will be erected around the grave at the conclusion of the mortuary rites. A song about a sharp axe rather than a blunt one tells the workers they ought to produce prestigious posts. The carved and painted posts 'represent a tactile presence of the deceased', offer insiders visual clues to the dead person's identity and relationships, and are ritually processed in similar fashion to the bodies of close relatives participating in the death rites (Venbrux 2007, 101). As markers of the grave they provide material testimony to the transformation of relations, the deceased's prestige and the descendants' territorial entitlements. Another task of the workers is to keep the spirits of the dead at bay and to do away with the personal belongings of the deceased. The detachment of whatever was in contact with the deceased by means of taboos, the presence of absence, enables the tie-breaking. In the intermediary rites the mock fight between potential spouses is considered a hitting out of the taboo (*pukamani*), their mutual relationship thus being transformed. The initiates part from their previous position in the rites and move on, filling a gap on the social ladder left by the death. Some of the deceased's personal effects might be used, if need be, to substitute for the corpse in a grave. Or, in the final rites, they might be used for emotional reasons to evoke the presence of the dead person, allowing the completion of the transformation of relationships to be effected.

The clearest demonstrations of the transformation of relationships are given by the dances and related songs and gestures involving body parts, standing for the intersubjective relationship to the deceased. The embodied relationships show that significant kin relationships are perceived and experienced as literally incorporated. Pain is felt in those places in the body when something is wrong with the related person, and ultimately on the occasion of that person's demise, that part of the body is wounded or marked as

such. During my fieldwork people sometimes put bandages on these places. They also hit or hurt themselves on the respective places on their body. One man even went to hospital to have X-rays of his chest – indicating the particular relationship – made after the death of a classificatory child. In the Tiwi case, the terms of the relationship thus happen to be present in one's body. The respective body parts, as we have seen, are emphasised in the mortuary rites to work through a transformation of the relationship. Someone who had one grandparent with the deceased in common, for example, would lose half of their face. Healing or finding back the lost half of the face would only be possible when the deceased cousin had been transformed into a spirit of the dead and could be met at the location of the grandparent's grave. Their close identification also follows from the fact that the names of people in this relationship to the deceased (called *mutuni*) who had died earlier substitute for the name of the newly deceased person in the mourning songs.

Others are part and parcel of the self.

Hence we see the appositeness of applying the expanded concept of the postself that goes beyond an individualistic and psychologistic approach to the Tiwi context. Furthermore, taking a focus on the mechanisms of transformation of relations made clear how the postself in Tiwi fashion is constructed. The application of the concept of the postself to a non-western context, I contend, can be productive. In the present case, I believe, it makes sense and gives an improved insight in what Tiwi mortuary ritual is actually about.

Note

1. Recently, several anthropologists (for example, Keen 2006; Redmond 2008; Smith 2016) have applied the concepts of the dividual and partible person, developed within the ethnography of South Asia and Melanesia, to Aboriginal Australia. As Glaskin (2012, 298, 304) points out, however, this characterization has been criticized (by Sahlins among others) not only for conflating personhood with kinship, but also for attributing 'a pre-modern subjectivity' to Aborigines. In the present case, I believe the symbolic interactionist theory of the self has greater explanatory value and avoids an unnecessary dichotomy between western and non-western selfhood (Spiro 1993) and between philosophies of becoming and being (Mead 1972).

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